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GLORIA MOLINA CREATES 'LEGAL EXPOSURE REDUCTION COMMITTEE' TO REDUCE COUNTY'S LITIGATION COSTS

Committee to Step Up Risk Management Efforts, Save More Public Dollars

LOS ANGELES (November 5, 2008)—Los Angeles County Supervisor Gloria Molina announced today the formation of a Legal Exposure Reduction Committee, which will step up the county's already successful efforts to save public dollars spent on litigation costs by requiring individual departments to coordinate with the County Counsel and the Office of Risk Management to identify ways that they can reduce exposure to potential lawsuits—and take proactive steps to achieve that goal.

"Every dollar spent on a lawsuit could be used to pay for vital services to the public—and for staff to carry out these services," said Molina. "By reducing potential liability, the county in effect increases its budget. To do this, we need every employee and every manager to do their part to change help change our 'county culture' for the better. Employees should use common sense to avoid legal exposure. They should be well-versed in the county's policies and protocols—and department heads should ensure that employees are following these rules. Those who are explicitly charged with risk management should ensure that line managers and supervisors are properly trained on risk management issues, from personnel matters to workers' compensation. But most importantly, we must take the time to step back, look at the broader picture, examine trends to make systemic changes, and learn from our experiences so we can be more proactive in our approach to risk management—which perfectly defines what the mission of the new Legal Exposure Reduction Committee will be. The annual reports we receive from them shouldn't just provide numbers. They should also offer analysis, strategies, and recommended actions so the county—and, thus, the taxpayers—can save money in the short- and long-term."

At today's meeting of the Board of Supervisors, Molina and her colleagues officially approved the creation of the Legal Exposure Reduction Committee upon receipt of the latest Litigation Cost Report. It revealed an \$11.6 million in the county's legal fees, costs, and payouts during Fiscal Year 2007-2008. However, the report also noted that the county was served with 736 more legal cases than last year—a ten percent increase. This led Molina to conclude that better, more proactive coordination between various county agencies could further reduce the county's legal exposure—and, thus, its legal costs.

In addition to creating the Legal Exposure Reduction Committee, Molina's motion requires that each department head formulate official goals to decrease risk in their respective departments. Also, the county's Chief Executive Officer, Department of Human Resources Director, and County Counsel must develop training for line supervisors on personnel matters—including progressive discipline, documentation, accommodation, and other issues. The committee specifically was directed to:

- Establish annual, countywide, and departmental legal exposure reduction goals;
- Create proactive County Counsel procedures to advise departments on various methods to reduce legal costs;
- Develop and implement specific strategies calculated to prevent future claims and lawsuits by assessing the efficacy of corrective action plans, reviewing management training and implementation of county policies, identifying lessons learned, and discussing areas of potential exposure;
- Provide updated training on new changes in laws and policies for each appropriate department to implement;
- Report annually on their progress and efforts.

"The responsibility to reduce exposure to lawsuits falls on each of us, from the Board of Supervisors to all our county employees," Molina said. "In these difficult economic times, we must be ever more vigilant in protecting the public purse."